

Shepherds & Sheep



The heath was not only his livelihood, but also his whole life"

Sandlings Walk

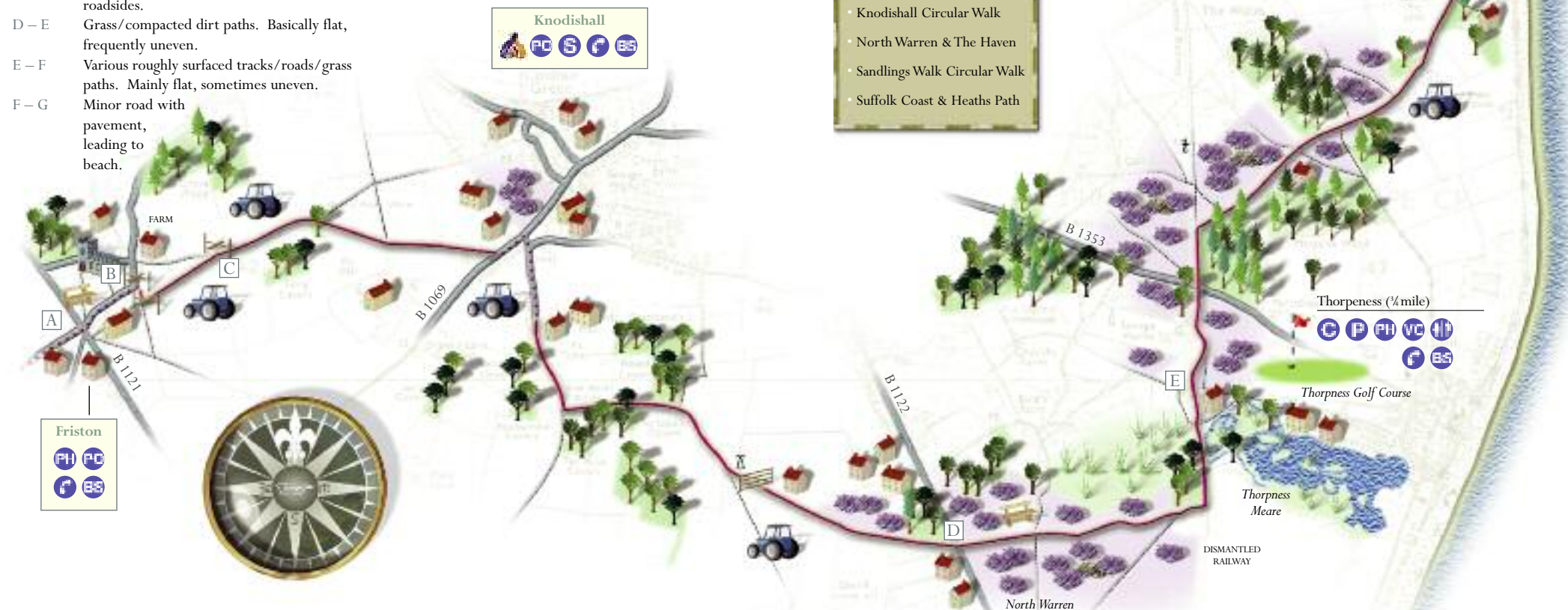
Walk 8 FRISTON – SIZEWELL

The Route – path terrain and conditions

- A – B Minor road.
- B – C Compacted soil. Slight incline. Leads onto flat path across cattle field. Boards across ditch.
- C – D Varying compacted dirt/grass/stony tracks. Mainly flat. Raised verges/pavements at roadsides.
- D – E Grass/compacted dirt paths. Basically flat, frequently uneven.
- E – F Various roughly surfaced tracks/roads/grass paths. Mainly flat, sometimes uneven.
- F – G Minor road with pavement, leading to beach.

Alternative Permissive Route – path terrain and conditions (No Dogs Permitted)

- F – G' Minor road. Pavement present. Leading to loose sand/dirt access track. Uneven.



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Shepherds & Sheep

Ever since the Sandlings were created several thousand years ago there have been shepherds. The first were nomadic tribesmen who herded their stock to graze in forest clearings abandoned by Neolithic farmers. The Neolithic farmers discovered that crops soon failed in the poor sandy soil. Instead, heather and grasses grew. These areas were the first Sandlings heaths.

Sandlings sheep flocks are recorded in the Domesday Book, but sheep farming was at its height in the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1795 a flock of 1,600 sheep were recorded on Tinkers Walk in Walberswick.

The Sandlings were eventually populated with Suffolk black-faced sheep. In the seventeenth century it was written "Their fleece is fine, flesh is sweet, so fat and ready to breed and ever bringing profit to the owner".



Sheep were grazed on the heath during the day and then led to enclosures in fields at night so that their droppings would fertilise the ground. This daily routine of leading the sheep to and from the heaths created local place names that still exist today, such as Toby's Walk and Westleton Walks.



ARTHUR SUTTON'S CARAVAN

D. Barrett

The life of the shepherd would have been a hard one. The heath was not only his livelihood, but also his whole life. On Sutton Heath you will pass the remnants of a shepherd's cottage garden. Daffodils, damson trees and a lilac bush mark the spot.

Records from 1861 show that there were 878 shepherds still employed in Suffolk. One of the last Sandlings shepherds was Arthur Sutton who was born in 1904. At the age of 12 he earned 2/6d (12 1/2p) a weekday and 3/6d (17 1/2p) on Sunday working as a shepherd's page to his father. His day started at 7.00am when the sheep were walked onto the heath and it finished at 4.30pm when they were returned to their overnight enclosures.

In early March, when lambing began, Arthur and his father lived on the heath in a wooden caravan. They would build a straw yard for the sheep dogs and a shelter for the lambing ewes. Any sickly newborn would spend the night in the caravan close to the stove.

June was a happier time, if no less tough, when the shepherds went in gangs from farm to farm, shearing thousands of sheep by hand. At each farm they would be greeted with home brewed beer.

Most Sandlings sheep farms disappeared soon after World War I when they became unprofitable. Arthur retired as one of the last Sandlings shepherds in the early 1970s.

Sheep had been a constant feature on the Sandlings right up until the early 20th century and had helped to manage the Sandlings heaths all that time.



ARTHUR SUTTON

D. Barrett



When they began to disappear, so did much of the Sandlings with them.

Recently, a few flocks of sheep have reappeared on the Sandlings to help with conservation work. They trample the invading bracken and nibble tree seedlings to help stop the heaths reverting back to woodland. Look out for them on Sutton and Hollesley heaths and Aldringham Walks.

